

# GOWER BIRD HOSPITAL



Number 8 / 2004

## *In this Issue*

- Ringing scheme
- Hedgehogs
- Statistics
- Grant funding
- House martin study
- and much more

**£ 1.75**

Patron: Paul Llewellyn, MPhil, CBiol, MIBiol

Registered Charity No: 1053912

## Cover story

**HAPPY ENDING** A BTO ring being fitted before release and, below, fluid therapy being administered.



# Falcon's flight to freedom

**L**ATE one evening in July, two policemen arrived at Gower Bird Hospital with a peregrine falcon. She had been found in the middle of Swansea in the doorway of a supermarket. The symptoms rang alarm bells straight away – rigid legs and wings, twitching head.

Brita, our voluntary vet, examined the bird and treatment was started immediately for suspected strychnine poisoning. To maintain body temperature, the peregrine was kept warm in our special, heated raptor box, well padded with towels. Fluid therapy was given twice daily to reduce the risk of kidney failure and help flush out the toxins.

Handling was kept to an absolute minimum to reduce stress, leaving the bird undisturbed in peace and quiet between medications.

The next day there was a slight improvement - the left leg started moving. The day after, we were amazed and relieved to see the peregrine standing and looking very bright and perky. The improvement was so great that we moved her

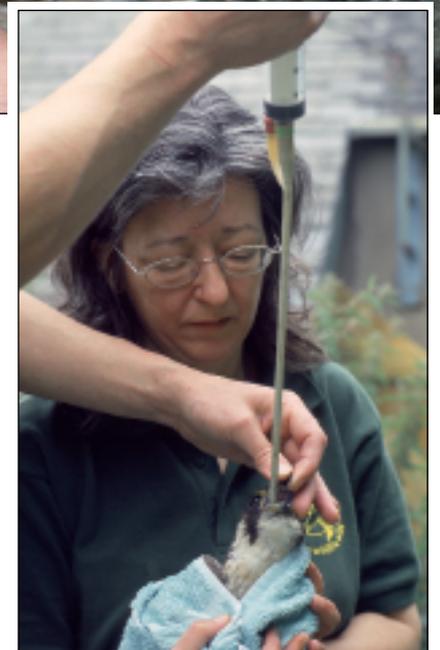
to a larger indoor facility. She couldn't fly up onto the perches but did wolf down two chicks.

On the fourth day she was eating well and was strong enough to fly up onto the perch, so we moved her into the raptor aviary.

Like all our aviaries, it is fitted with CCTV cameras so we can observe the patients' progress without disturbing them.

Six days after she was first admitted, the peregrine had completely recovered. (Thanks again to Swansea Police – their prompt delivery of the sick bird was a key factor in her recovery.)

A BTO ring was fitted and the peregrine released. She flew off beautifully, back into her home territory and the freedom of the open sky.



## Newsletter no 8

# Welcome

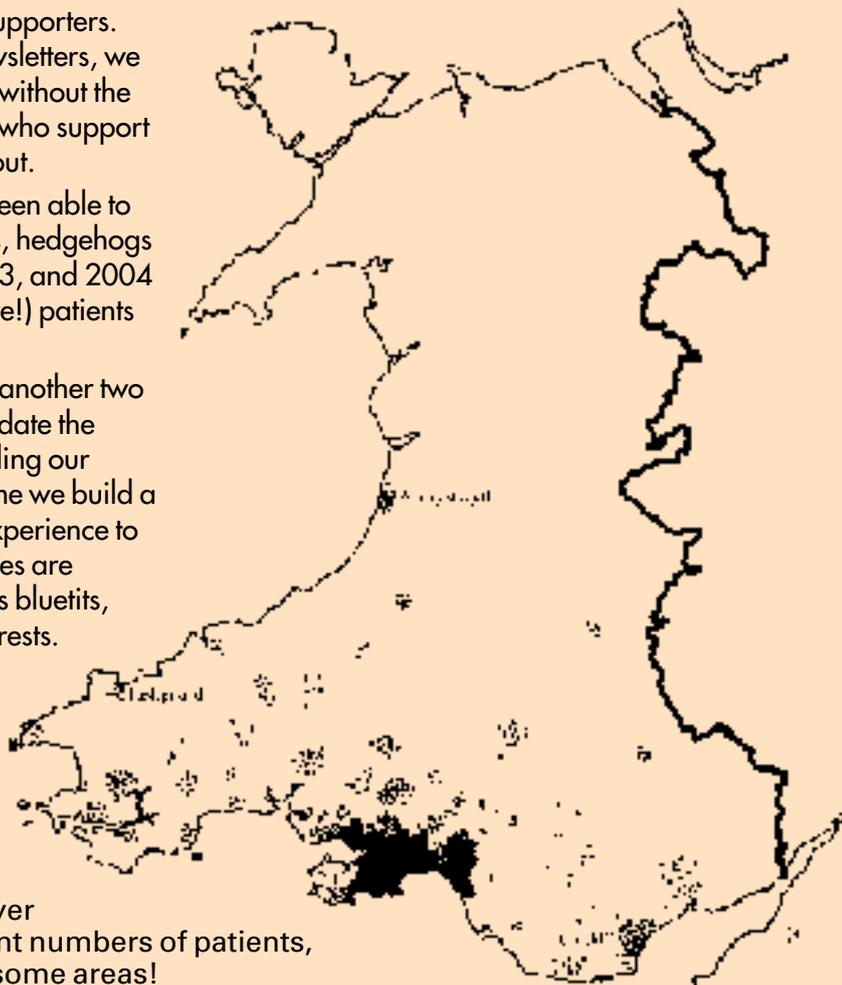
**F**IRST a big thank you to all our supporters. Although we say it in all our newsletters, we really could not do the work we do without the help of the kind and caring people who support us again and again, year in, year out.

Gower Bird Hospital has again been able to care for more than 1 200 wild birds, hedgehogs and other wild animals during 2003, and 2004 will bring just as many (maybe more!) patients needing our help.

This year we will be able to build another two rehabilitation aviaries to accommodate the increasing number of patients needing our facilities and experience – every time we build a new facility, we can draw on our experience to improve the design. The new aviaries are specifically for smaller birds such as bluetits, robins, sparrows, wrens and goldcrests.

*Neil Simon*

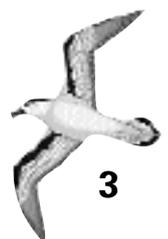
**AT A GLANCE** Since 1993, over 11,000 wildlife casualties have arrived at Gower Bird Hospital from all over South Wales. The dots represent numbers of patients, but we just ran out of space in some areas!



### RAPTOR REHABILITATION AVIARY

This large aviary is designed for birds of prey. The original flat mesh roof has now been replaced with a dome of soft netting, increasing the height of the aviary. (Raptor Rescue kindly gave us a grant towards this improvement.) Increased space and the resulting change of perch positions greatly improved the design, reducing the stress of the temporarily captive birds – if stress is reduced, recovery and release is much faster.

Many raptors (kestrels, buzzards, sparrowhawks, peregrines, tawny and barn owls and a goshawk) have benefited from the new aviary design.



# Young ones It's a

*The perilous journey from nestling, through fledgling and juvenile to adulthood*

**A**LMOST half of the patients arriving at Gower Bird Hospital every year are dependant young – nestlings and fledglings. More than 70 different species of bird arrive at the Hospital every year and the first task is to identify the species and research their natural history.

This is vital – to have a real chance of survival in the wild the birds must be able to behave in exactly the same way as birds raised by their natural parents. A tame hand-reared bird is an imprinted bird, it believes that human beings are its parents and will grow up expecting to mate with humans and defend its territory from humans.

This can be a real problem if the bird is released. A bird with sharp claws landing on people's heads (either to mate with them or drive them away) can cause eye and other injuries.

It is also very difficult emotionally for the individual bird, as it is usually rejected by its own kind because of its unnatural behaviour, and living with people means being kept permanently in a cage or aviary leading to stress and depression.

## ***Silence is the golden rule***

**NESTLINGS hatch from the egg bald and blind, totally dependant on the parents for food and warmth and remain in the nest until they fledge. As they grow, their eyes open and their feathers start to develop.**

**At this stage (and very early fledgling stage) they will open their beaks for food when triggered by any stimulus, not just their natural parents. We are very careful not to talk to these youngsters when feeding them, as they will otherwise quickly associate human voices with food.**



**READY TO FLY** Blackbird fledgling.

## **When it's time**

MANY species leave the nest before their feathers are fully grown and hop around in bushes and on the ground – these are now fledglings and are still being fed and supervised by the parents.

There are distinct advantages in leaving the nest: A nest of three, four or more chicks is noisy and attracts the attention of predators. The fledglings instinctively disperse so there is less chance of them all being caught at once – losing one or two is



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# wild world



**MOUTHS TO FEED** Hungry robin nestlings (left), a bird in the hand (top) and starling nestlings.

## to strike out on your own

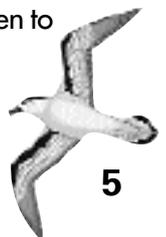
better than losing all of them. Out of the nest there is more room to exercise and flap the developing wings. As the feathers grow, so the flight muscles are being exercised and strengthened ready for take-off as soon as possible! They are also learning about their environment and, although still being fed by the parents, are learning to co-ordinate their movements and find their own food.

As the nestlings at the Hospital reach this stage,

they are moved outside into one of our rehabilitation aviaries where they are still hand-fed initially. At this stage, we also provide as many natural food sources as possible (worms, mealworms and other insects) to encourage them to forage and find their own food.

Watching them on the CCTV cameras, we can see when they start feeding for themselves and when to

● To page 6



## Young ones **It's a wild world**

**ALL species have their own particular lifestyles. Ducklings, for example, do not have a nestling stage - as soon as they hatch they are able to feed themselves and keep warm thanks to their downy coats.**

**Other species such as woodpeckers spend a much longer time with their parents after fledging, being taught the specialist skills they need to survive.**

**An important note about tawny owls**

**These chicks leave the nest when still covered in fluff and climb around on the branches, sometimes falling to the ground but quite capable of climbing back up into the trees using their feet and beaks.**

**Owls need very strong legs and talons to catch their prey, maybe this behaviour is strengthening their legs ready to catch their first meal.**



**Every year, these youngsters are picked up by people thinking they are lost or have been abandoned but nothing could be further from the truth.**

**The parents are continuing to feed their youngsters, locating them by calling through the night.**

**Whenever a young tawny owl is brought to Gower Bird Hospital, we get it back to where it was found as quickly as possible. It does seem strange to take a young bird back to the woods in the dark and just leave it there, but the parents will be frantically**

**searching for the chick.**

**We took one baby back to the woods where it had been found, left it in a suitable tree, walked away and hid very quietly. Within ten minutes, the baby had started calling and was answered by the parents who continued to feed it!**

## **When it's time to strike out on your own**

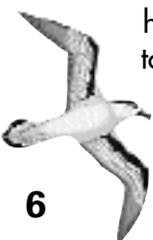
### **● From page 5**

reduce hand-feeding. Without CCTV this would be much more difficult to assess as they will continue to beg for food when a person enters the aviary even though they are quite capable of feeding for themselves.

For example, blackbirds will be independent just three weeks after fledging and it is vital to stop hand-feeding as soon as possible for the birds to develop naturally.

As the fledgling grows its feathers and learns through experience, it becomes a fully fledged juvenile, able to fly and find food for itself.

Birds which have more than one brood a year, such as blackbirds and robins, become fully independent more quickly than species which have just one brood a year. Many species have juvenile plumage which moults through the seasons into adult plumage.



# *Duty of care* Back to nature

**T**HE welfare of our patients is our prime concern. Gower Bird Hospital is one of the few wildlife rehabilitation centres in the country to carry out essential pre- and post-release studies.

Our rehabilitation aviaries are specially designed and fitted with CCTV cameras for us to observe behaviour without disturbing the birds. Hospital staff radio-tracking released patients are becoming a familiar sight on Gower.

These studies improve standards of care for inpatients and follow their progress after release, ensuring our rehabilitation methods are successful and giving our patients the best chance of survival in the wild.

During 2003 we radio-tracked hand-reared house martins to ensure they were surviving and integrating with the local population. Between 30 and 40 house martin nestlings are admitted every year.

They are very specialised birds spending most of their lives airborne and migrating to Africa every autumn. When they arrive as nestlings, they are fed with a mix of insect food including mealworms and waxworms.

Special nests are put into the rehabilitation aviaries and the nestlings are fed every hour. As soon as they fledge from the nest, they are ready to fly and are released as soon as possible into our local house martin community.

But are they surviving? There was only one way to find out and Simon took on the task.

A tiny transmitter was fitted to the central tail feather of one house martin and it was released with its siblings in Pennard.



**STARTING OUT** House martin nestlings.

Left Simon radio-tracking and, inset, the tiny transmitter.

Simon followed the signal every day for two weeks and was able to spot 'our' bird every day, interacting with other house martins, feeding, roosting, sometimes flying with a flock of over 50 or 'hanging out' with smaller groups of four or up to a dozen.

The most reassuring finding was that our bird's behaviour was exactly like its wild counterparts – it did nothing that made it stand out from the crowd, it was not tame – we had successfully rehabilitated this house martin back into the wild.

As all the house martins are treated in exactly the same way, we are very hopeful that they are all as successful as the one we radio-tracked.

Simon is currently writing a detailed report on this radio-tracking project which will be published and made available to all interested parties.



# *Gull talk* It's a rotte

**I**N August 2003 we received a phone call from one of our 'regulars', a lady called Jo. Jo was sailing just off Langland and Caswell and had spotted a large seagull drifting in the sea looking very weak, and had managed to fish it out of the water.

The sailing trip was cut short to come ashore and drive the bird to the Hospital. (Not many people would go to all this trouble – thanks again, Jo!) The bird was a juvenile great black-backed gull suffering from botulism.

This is a common problem for gulls, especially during the summer, mainly caused by the gulls eating rotting food from our rubbish tips. (We also see this problem just after Christmas when a lot more food than usual is thrown away.)

The bacteria produce a toxin which blocks the signals from the nerves to the muscles resulting in what appears to be paralysis, sometimes the gull can't even raise its head.

We have a very good success rate with these 'flat' gulls. The youngster's treatment was started and the number of the BTO ring on its leg recorded.

Four days later, another juvenile great black-backed gull was rescued and brought to Gower Bird Hospital. This one had been found on Rhossili Beach by a lady called Helen.

A huge fishing lure was in its beak with one of the large treble hooks stuck through the upper palate of the beak. The fishing line continued down to the right foot where another hook was embedded.

Each time it moved his head up it would pull on the hook in the foot and moving its foot would pull on the hook in the beak. This bird also had a BTO ring.

The number was recorded and was the consecutive number of Jo's gull. In our new operating theatre, our vet was able to quickly administer anaesthetic and remove the hooks.

The wound in the foot was nasty but would heal - more worrying was the extensive damage in the soft tissue of the beak. More line was found around the right wing resulting in a superficial wound.

Antibiotic and painkiller injections were given and the gull left to recover in a warm seclusion

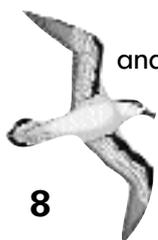


room. The next day we were relieved to find it had eaten the fish we provided.

We were now able to put the medication in the food which saved the gull the fright of being caught and handled for injections. It spent the next five days making full use of our largest aquapen, bathing, preening and eating well and the wound in its beak healed rapidly.

The other great black-backed gull was now strong enough to start rehabilitation and joined its possible sibling in the aquapen.

The consecutive BTO ring numbers could only mean that these two birds had been ringed one after another. We reported the numbers to the BTO and, sure enough, both birds had been ringed as nestlings on St Margaret's Island, Pembrokeshire, more than a year ago on June 26, 2002.



# n life on our tips



**ROAD TO RECOVERY**  
Two great black-backed gulls recovering.  
Inset, a gull with a BTO ring on its leg.

## It's a *fact*

**GREAT** black-backed gulls are the largest gulls seen in Britain with an impressive wing span of up to one and a half metres (five feet). They are not often admitted at the Hospital – three or four a year is average.

To receive two great black-backed gulls with different problems, consecutive ring numbers and to be able to release them together again – there's probably more chance of winning the Lottery!



**HOLD TIGHT**  
Barry and Simon ringing a peregrine.

## Give us a ring – how we keep in touch

**GOWER** Bird Hospital can now use BTO rings as another means of post-release monitoring.

Barry Stewart, a trained BTO ringer, is one of our latest specialist volunteers donating his valuable time and skills.

As well as fitting BTO rings to many species of birds prior to release, Gower Bird Hospital has its own colour-coded rings specifically for gulls.

Around 50 herring and lesser black backed gulls are admitted at the Hospital every year - often suffering from botulism.

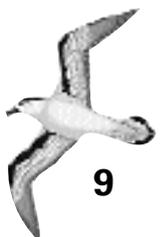
To follow on from our radio-tracking project, every gull is now fitted with a BTO

ring and a blue plastic ring marked clearly with a white 'Y'.

The BTO rings are practically impossible to read from a distance so the only feedback comes from trapped, injured or sick birds ending up in people's hands; the blue rings can be identified by people using binoculars or telescopes watching healthy gulls in the wild.

Although we can't identify the individual, sightings of gulls with this particular ring confirms it was once a Gower Bird Hospital patient.

One report was of a juvenile herring gull feeding with a crowd of other gulls in Gloucester!



*Creature comforts*

# Operation

**M**ORE than 200 hedgehogs are brought to Gower Bird Hospital every year. About a third of these are babies, abandoned by their mum after their nest has been disturbed or destroyed. The other two thirds are juveniles and adults suffering from illnesses and injuries.

One hedgehog was found with a plastic tie around his chest. As a youngster, he had got the tie over his head while foraging for food, then got both front legs through where it stuck. He continued to grow and the tie tightened, cutting through his skin.

Our vet, Brita, was able to remove the tie and clean the wounds under general anaesthetic thanks to our new operating theatre. Without our help, this little hedgehog would have suffered a slow and painful death.

Elastic bands and plastic can holders can all cause this sort of injury. If you see any on the ground, please pick them up and cut them before putting into the bin.

## Creatures of the night

**REMEMBER** Hedgehogs are nocturnal - a hedgehog out in the day is probably suffering from an injury or illness and will need medical help.



**HAPPY HOG** Just a scar to tell the tale three weeks after having a plastic tie removed from his chest.



**TICKETY BOO** Hedgehog with ticks.

## Ticks – all part of a natural cycle

**MANY** hedgehogs arrive with ticks. The ticks attach themselves to the hedgehog (or other animal) suck blood until they are fully gorged and then drop off again.

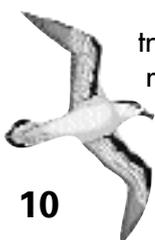
This is part of a natural cycle and the ticks rarely cause problems for the hedgehog.

More problems can be caused by people trying to remove them – pulling a tick off can result in the tick's body being removed but the

head left embedded in the hedgehog. This can cause infections and abscesses.

A severe infestation of ticks could suck too much blood leaving the hedgehog anaemic but this is not very common – please ring us for advice.

If you have found a hedgehog out in the day with a few ticks on, the chances are that the hedgehog is suffering from some other, more serious problem that needs attention.



# hedgehog



**BATTLE WOUNDS** Hedgehog with a bite wound from bullying.

**HEDGEHOGS** look for quiet areas in gardens to make their nests. These can be hibernaculum for the winter, or day nests through the spring and summer.

Day nests are not permanent homes, a hedgehog may have several day nests and use them in rotation through the summer months, finally selecting the best one as a hibernaculum.

Pregnant hedgehogs make nests to have their young. As the weather improves, people start clearing up their gardens and what was

an undisturbed area suddenly gets a lot of attention.

We radio-tracked one female hedgehog to this compost bag! Luckily, the owners of the garden were delighted to have a hedgehog making herself at home and left the bag full of garden trimmings undisturbed.

The hedgehog then produced a litter of babies in her rather superior accommodation. The bag was going to be emptied onto a bonfire so this hedgehog and her family had a very lucky escape!

## Questions of social behaviour

**JUVENILES** arrive all through autumn and winter. Hedgehogs need to be fat enough to hibernate. If they are underweight they will not hibernate, but continue to search for food.

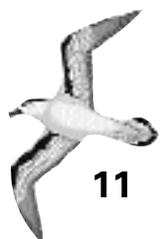
As temperatures drop, their natural food source (worms and insects) decreases, so the hedgehog has to work harder to find food. This becomes a vicious circle as the hedgehog uses more and more energy trying to find food, losing weight instead of putting on fat reserves.

It is common practice to overwinter these hedgehogs, building them up ready for release in the spring.

Often, hedgehogs are kept together in a room for the winter months. At Gower Bird Hospital, we noticed injuries which could only have been caused by the hedgehogs fighting with each other.

In the wild, hedgehogs practise mutual

● To page 12



## *Creature comforts*

AS well as hedgehogs, many other small mammals arrive at Gower Bird Hospital needing help.

One long-eared bat was thin and weak when it was found near Brawdy, Pembrokeshire. Weighing just 5g on arrival, it soon settled into one of our bat hospital boxes enjoying the warmth supplied by a heat lamp and perked up enough to start eating wax worms and mealworms.

After a couple of days rest, we gave it daily flying

practice to exercise stiff muscles – at first it could only manage a few minutes, but every day saw some improvement.

Sixteen days later it had doubled in weight, was flying strongly and was very keen to leave the Hospital, thank you very much!

It was taken back to its home territory and released, looking a lot better than when it arrived.

## Happy tale of an orphan weasel

THREE or four weasels are admitted every year. This one was found on a path alongside his dead mother.

We treated him as we treat baby hedgehogs: kept warm in a box on a heat pad, fed and toiletted every few hours and contact kept to a minimum to prevent him becoming imprinted. He was remarkably easy to feed and quickly gained weight.

His teeth came through very quickly, just after opening his eyes he was 'attacking' and eating pieces of chopped meat.

These tiny creatures are excellent hunters – our main concern was that he was being reared on his own and this might affect his natural behaviour.

Within three weeks he was outside in an adapted hedgehog run, making his own nest and exploring the environment of logs, twigs, stones and leaves we created for him. We always have supplies of frozen mice for birds of prey so his food was as natural as we could make it.



We knew 'our' weasel wasn't tame, but we didn't know whether our hand-rearing had psychologically confused him.

Fortunately, another weasel of the same age arrived. We introduced them and 'our' hand-reared weasel was delighted, they immediately started playing together. Seeing this natural behaviour was a great relief, as we knew they would have a good chance of survival when released back into the wild.

## Questions of social behaviour

### ● From page 11

avoidance – they simply move away from each other. Our concern was that the unnatural close confinement was leading to unusually aggressive behaviour.

The hedgehog room was flooded with infrared

light and over 1,000 hours of hedgehog behaviour recorded. Our MPhil student, Stam has almost completed his thesis. When finished, this will answer important questions and hopefully improve the quality of life for overwintering hedgehogs across the country.



## Helping hands



**LOVELY MONEY**  
Welcome contributions from the Royal Pigeon Racing Association (left) and Wildaid (below).

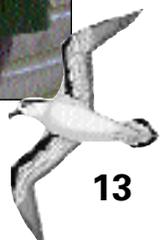
## A word to our 'sponsors'

**A**S well as donations from our supporters, Gower Bird Hospital received the following grants and donations from charitable trusts and businesses:

Major local donors are The Gower Society, Pennard Community Charity, Visteon Automotive Systems, Atlas Fire Engineering, Taliesin Computer Associates and Bardon Aggregates.

Thanks also to Awards for All (Wales), GC Gibson Charitable Trust, Wildaid, The Llysdinam Trust, The Barry Green Memorial Fund, Care for the Wild International, Raptor Rescue, Royal Pigeon Racing Association, The Jean Sainsbury Animal Welfare Trust and The British Hedgehog Preservation Society.

Swansea Development Fund has provided two years of funding (2002-04) enabling Gower Bird Hospital to employ a part-time wildlife care assistant, purchase clothes with our logo, print our leaflet 'What to do if you find injured wildlife', provide mileage expenses for our volunteers and purchase the slide projector and screen for our increasingly popular slide shows!



If anyone wants to organise an event we can help with producing sponsor forms, posters or whatever else you might need. Get in touch!

## Fund-raising Thanks again

**W**E would also like to thank the growing number of organisations and individuals who organise fund-raising events for Gower Bird Hospital, and the kind people who have phoned us to say they have included Gower Bird Hospital in their will.

### **Kenfig National Nature Reserve**

organises a sponsored walk around the reserve to raise funds for Gower Bird Hospital. All the walkers enjoy walking around this beautiful reserve with the added bonus of wardens sharing their knowledge and expertise, pointing out flora and fauna that might have otherwise escaped unnoticed.

**Rhydderch Wilson** is quickly becoming a Gower Bird Hospital hero. Having run the Swansea 10K twice previously to raise funds for us, this year he ran the London Marathon and raised an amazing £710.00.

The **Heyokah Centre** in Swansea hosted a Crafts and Healing Day with all proceeds donated to Gower Bird Hospital.



NOT SO UGLY Shelduck duckling.

Pennard Parish Hall was the venue for two very entertaining and popular evenings starring well-known Ceilidh band **Rough Edge** and a 70s Disco hosted by our own **DJ Dai Disco!**

A big thank you to: the people who run stalls (and the shops and individuals who donate items) for Gower Bird Hospital at charity fairs and other venues throughout the year and, of course, all the shops, garages and veterinary surgeries holding collection boxes for us.

## Tribute to a man with wildlife at heart

**MANY** people were saddened by the sudden death of one of our founder members, Dave Kinsella.

Dave's contribution to Gower Bird Hospital was invaluable. It was he who took the bull by the horns and registered us as a charity after the Sea Empress Oil Disaster in 1996.

Dave was one of our most committed volunteers: he organised the office systems, built several of our aviaries

(donating his time and often the materials needed) and raised funds wherever he could – organising events, running boot sales and applying for grants.

Dave's greatest passion was animal welfare and he was always proud of Gower Bird Hospital's achievements. He will be missed by many, many people. Thank you, Dave!



## Our policy

# The minimum of interference

**T**REATING wildlife is very different from treating domestic pets. All wildlife has a natural wariness of humans and will be frightened by the presence of people.

This is why our rehabilitation aviaries are fitted with CCTV cameras enabling us to observe birds when they are relaxed.

A frightened bird will hold up a dropped wing or stand on an aching leg when it feels threatened so that any possible predator will not single it out as a weak specimen and an easy target.

Staring into an aviary will simply frighten the bird and you will not be able to assess its condition - using

the CCTV cameras allows us to make much more accurate assessments.

When rearing youngsters, we use the CCTV to check if they are feeding themselves in the aviaries. Walking into the aviary at this stage can result in the birds begging for food but hand-feeding must be stopped as soon as possible to prevent the birds becoming imprinted on people.

It could be very tempting to open up the Hospital for people to walk around and look at the patients and thereby raise money, but our patients always come first and it simply wouldn't be in their interest to put them on display to raise funds.

**Thanks again to our supporters who understand our policies – many people support us because the welfare of our wildlife casualties is always top priority and we are not open to the public**

## Why we need your support

**EVERY year more than 1200 wildlife casualties arrive at Gower Bird Hospital. Your donation helps directly with the running costs of the Hospital ensuring these birds and hedgehogs have the best chance of survival in the wild.**

**Gower Bird Hospital can apply for grants – but grants are usually awarded to charities who are well supported by the community so your donation also helps us with our grant applications!**

**If you can give even a small monthly amount by standing order, the Hospital can plan for the future knowing that funds are coming in, but we appreciate all donations.**

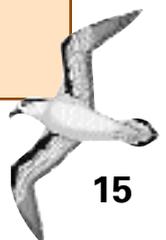
**Please use the enclosed form to donate and if you pay income tax, tick the Gift Aid declaration as this increases your donation by 28% at no**



**SHOW YOUR COLOURS** We now have car stickers (10cm) for sale at £1.25 inc p&p.

**extra cost to you. Gower Bird Hospital needs your support – if the form is missing, cheques can be made payable to Gower Bird Hospital and sent to our address on the last page.**

**Thank you.**





**SPECIAL CARE** 'Our' long-eared bat, and, right, our rehabilitation aviary for smaller birds.



## Getting in touch

**Tel: 01792 371630**

A phone call is always greatly appreciated prior to the admission of a wildlife casualty

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**Registered Charity No: 1053912**



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**Trustees:** Sylvia Gooding, Christine Griffiths, Nigel Haworth, Barry Hicks, Dave Johnston, Marilyn Thomas

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### **LOOKING OUT FOR YOU**

Our CCTV set-up (left) and a young adult nuthatch.

